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ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*®

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a **NEW** Henry S. Turnbuckle story by

JACK RITCHIE

Another story about Sergeant Turnbuckle of the Milwaukee Police Department, and one of his finest hours . . . See if you can keep pace with Turnbuckle's 'tec theories—he's a wiz at theories and deductions therefrom, especially when he "smells murder" . . .

SOME DAYS ARE LIKE THAT

by **JACK RITCHIE**

I got the correct forms and returned to our desk. "What is this missing person's name?"

"Helmuth Pringle," Mrs. Watson said. "He's my brother and he lives with me and my husband." Mrs. Watson appeared to be in her middle forties.

Ralph watched me type the name and then went to one of the phones at another desk.

"How long has your brother been missing?" I asked.

"Since about seven last night."

It was now ten in the morning.

She continued, "Helmuth went for his walk like he always does after supper. And he usually comes back to the house by eight o'clock. But eight came and went and he didn't come home."

I elicited the further information that Helmuth was approximately five foot eight, had light brown hair, was 48 years old, and weighed 170 pounds.

"And when your brother did not return by eight, you began to worry?"

"Well, not too much right then. Once in a while he'll stop in somewhere for a few beers and forget the time. So I wasn't really too worried when I went to bed at ten thirty. Helmuth has a key and he could let himself in when he came back."

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"No. This morning when I looked in his bedroom I saw that his bed hadn't even been slept in. And so I came to you."

Ralph returned to our desk. "I phoned County General Hospital and they don't have any Helmuth Pringle." He explained to Mrs. Watson: "That's where people are usually taken if they get injured in an auto accident or something like that."

"What is his Social Security number?" I asked.

She blinked. "Why in the world would you want that?"

"We may need it. People disappear, get jobs elsewhere, but usually they continue using their own names and paying their Social Security deductions. So naturally the Social Security office would have their new addresses."

"Well," she said thoughtfully, "I don't believe Helmuth ever had a Social Security number."

I was mildly surprised. "Nowadays just about everybody has a Social Security number. What is his occupation?"

"He's retired," she said quickly.

I glanced at the form again. It must be nice to be retired at 48.

"Did he have any reason to leave? A quarrel, perhaps?"

"No. He was quite happy with us. And if he'd wanted to go somewhere, I'm certain he would have told us before he left."

I tried to be reassuring. "Perhaps he has a touch of amnesia. However, as soon as he remembers to look at his driver's license, he'll realize who he is and return home."

"He doesn't have a driver's license. He doesn't drive."

"Well, surely he must have some identification in his wallet. Credit cards?"

"He didn't believe in credit cards. At least not his own." She hesitated as though she had just said a little too much. "As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, I don't believe he ever carried a wallet. He just had a little green change purse where he kept a few folded bills and some change."

Ralph picked up the phone, this time at our desk, and dialed County General again.

When he hung up, he said, "Well, nobody unidentified has been taken to County General."

Mrs. Watson cleared her throat. "Well, it is *just* possible that he might have been carrying somebody else's wallet on his person."

"Why would he be carrying somebody else's wallet?" Ralph asked.

She was clearly uneasy. "Well, it just so happens that yesterday

he found a wallet. On the street. And he told me that he was going to take it back to its owner. But maybe he forgot and he would still be carrying that wallet."

"Would you remember the name of the wallet's owner?" I asked.

"No. Helmuth didn't show it to me. He just said that he'd found it."

Ralph and I pondered that for half a minute and then I picked up the phone and dialed County General again. Ralph picked up the extension to listen.

When I made my connection, I said, "This is Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle of the Milwaukee Police Department. I would like to know if there was a male, age forty-eight, hair brown, height five foot eight, and weight a hundred and seventy pounds, brought in after seven last night?"

There was a brief silence while my connection was evidently consulting records. He returned to the phone. "We got one that nearly matches. Except that his age is forty-nine. He was brought in at about seven-thirty. D.O.A. A hit-and-run case. His name was Albert Hennessey and he came from Spoon Junction. That's a little town about a hundred miles northwest of here."

I had heard of it, of course. "Do you have the body there?"

"No. We kept it long enough to confirm that he was dead and then turned it over to you people. It's a police matter. He should be in your morgue right now."

I dialed our morgue downstairs and got Harry Schleigel, the attendant on duty, and asked about the body.

He confirmed the County General report. "Albert Hennessey. We picked him up at about ten last night."

"Have you got a list of his personal belongings?"

"Sure. Handkerchief, comb, wallet, change purse."

"What color is the change purse?"

"It doesn't say here."

"We'll be right down there and have a look at the body."

"It isn't here any more."

"Why not?"

"His niece had it picked up. We phoned her the bad news and she drove down, identified the body, and made arrangements to have it picked up. The Mathewson Funeral Home."

I was thoughtful. "Aren't they here in town?"

"Right. They picked up the body about an hour ago."

I hung up and turned to a pale Mrs. Watson. "Well, the body isn't

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that of your brother, after all. I'm sure he's probably quite well and he'll return in a matter of days or at least let you know where he is. Do you have any photographs of him?"

She produced several snapshots from her purse and turned them over to me.

Ralph and I watched her go.

Ordinarily, in the case of a missing person, we let time mend the problem. In the first place, disappearing is in itself not a crime—at least, in the police sense. And secondly, the majority of missing persons return home within two days, and 95 percent within seven days. Only a fraction of disappearances are longer or permanent. And fewer still become police problems.

"That's odd," I said.

Ralph properly asked, "What's odd?"

"This niece patronized a funeral home right here in the city."

"What's so odd about that? They'll probably ship the body back home to Spoon Junction."

"But wouldn't it be much simpler and less expensive to have a funeral director from Spoon Junction come down *here* to pick up the body and take it back to Spoon Junction?"

"It's the same distance back and forth, Henry, no matter who does the driving."

"Yes, but if the Mathewson Funeral Home takes the body up there, another funeral home would probably have to be involved in the actual burial, wouldn't it? I mean, surely it is a matter of funerary ethics. One funeral home simply does not conduct a burial in another's territory. So wouldn't it have been wiser for the Spoon Junction funeral director to take care of the transportation of the body *and* the burial?"

Ralph rubbed his jaw at my acute reasoning. "Maybe this niece was so rattled by her uncle's death that she wasn't thinking straight."

"Perhaps. But I rather suspect that an ethical funeral director would have pointed out the advantages of patronizing her local undertaker, and until further notice we will assume that all funeral directors are ethical."

I got up. "Let's go down to the morgue."

Downstairs, Harry Schleigel sat at the desk.

I came to the point. "Are you positive that this niece identified the body as that of her uncle, Albert Hennessey?"

He indicated the papers on his desk. "According to these, she did. But I wasn't on duty when she came here."

"Who was?"

"Charley Thurston. He's on from midnight to eight A.M."

"Did you happen to get a look at the body when the funeral parlor people picked it up?"

"Sure."

I showed him the snapshots of Helmuth Pringle. "Do you recognize this man?"

Harry nodded. "That's the stiff you're talking about. Albert Hennessey. From Spoon Junction."

I smiled with restrained triumph. "He was not Albert Hennessey from Spoon Junction. He was Helmuth Pringle from Milwaukee. You said that Charley Thurston was on duty from midnight to eight? What's his phone number?"

Harry looked it up and I dialed.

Thurston sounded as though he had been asleep when the phone rang. I outlined the situation.

"Well," Charlie said, "I made the phone call to the niece at a little after midnight, when I checked in. The call should have been made earlier, but Clarence—he's on from four to midnight—doesn't like to call people and tell them that their loved ones are dead, so he sluffed it off on me."

"What did the niece say when you told her that her uncle was dead?"

He thought for a moment. "She said, 'Oh, no, that's impossible.'"

"Ah, ha," I said. "And what else?"

"I gave her a description of the body and she said that she'd drive down right away. She got here around two-thirty A.M."

"She identified the body as that of her uncle?"

"Right."

I let him go back to sleep and dialed the Mathewson Funeral Home. I identified myself and said, "Do you have a body there which is represented to you as that of one Albert Hennessey?"

"Yes. We picked up the deceased from your morgue. The deceased's niece, Alicia Hennessey, also from Spoon Junction, phoned us the circumstances. When my assistants reported for work at eight this morning, I sent them over to fetch the body."

"This niece requested that you transport her uncle back to Spoon Junction?"

"No. She asked us to cremate him."

I was alarmed. "Have you done so?"

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I smiled grimly. "Under no circumstances are you to cremate that body. This has become a police matter. Did this niece give you an address where she can be reached? A hotel, or motel around here?"

"No, she said that she was driving right back home to Spoon Junction and that she would be back later to pick up the ashes."

Ralph and I took the elevator back upstairs.

"Ralph," I said, "when a man finds a wallet on the street and the identification indicates that its owner lives some one hundred miles away, he is not likely to intend to personally return that wallet to its owner. Especially if he does not drive a car."

I led the way to Robbery Division and showed Sergeant Withers, a veteran of 25 years on the force, the snapshots of Helmuth Pringle.

Withers recognized him. "That's Helmuth the Hand."

I let Ralph ask, "Helmuth the Hand?"

"One of the best pickpockets in the city," Withers said. "He's been at it all his life and got caught a few times."

I nodded wisely. "That explains why he has no Social Security number. I don't believe the program covers his field."

Ralph and I went on to Captain Masterson's office where I conveyed all the information we had garnered so far.

Masterson shrugged. "So she made a mistake when she identified the body."

"Perhaps," I said. "However I would like to pursue this entire matter further. I request authorization to drive up to Spoon Junction and have a few words with Alicia Hennessey."

He sighed. "What are you up to now, Henry?"

I smiled grimly. "I smell murder, Captain Masterson. Murder."

There was an appropriate silence while Ralph and the captain studied me. Then Captain Masterson's face became a shade thoughtful. "All right, Henry, take a car and have your little trip."

When we left him, he was still thinking.

Ralph and I checked out a car from the police garage and Ralph took the wheel for Spoon Junction.

"Henry," Ralph said, "why would Helmuth the Hand carry his victim's wallet on his person? Why didn't he just take the money and throw the wallet away?"

"Ralph, this is the age of the checkbook and credit cards. People simply do not carry significant sums of cash in their wallets any more. I rather suspect that today a pickpocket's major source of income comes not from cash, but from the credit cards he finds in his victim's wallet. He uses them freely for a day or two and then

discards the wallet and its contents." I watched the passing scenery and then chuckled. "Words, words."

Ralph took his eyes from the traffic for a moment. "What words?"

"The words people use, and when, and why. For instance, when informed of her uncle's death, Alicia Hennessey's first words were, 'Oh, no, that's impossible!'"

"So? When people get news they don't want to believe, they say things like 'Oh, no, that's impossible,' or 'I don't believe it!'"

"True enough. However in the light of other things, I believe that when Alicia Hennessey said, 'Oh, no, that's impossible,' she was not reacting to bad news, she was simply stating a fact. Her uncle was quite alive and she knew it. Very probably at the time of the phone call he was sleeping peacefully in his own bed."

"Then why did she say that she'd be right down to identify the body?"

"Because at that moment there flashed into her mind one of the most cold-blooded murder plots we have ever encountered, Ralph. Alicia Hennessey knew that there must have been some mistake. But then she remembered that her uncle *had* been to Milwaukee recently and that his pocket *had* been picked while he was there. And when the morgue attendant went on to describe the corpse, she realized that it matched her uncle's physical description. I suspect that Helmuth the Hand made a practice of concentrating on the wallets of people who rather resembled him in general physique so that he would have no trouble using their credit cards."

Ralph sighed. "And so you think that she murdered her uncle, hid his body, and then came down to identify the corpse in our morgue as that of her uncle?"

"Not in that order, Ralph. I doubt if she would have been quite that rash. No, *first* she wondered *if* she could get away with murder, and it wouldn't hurt to find out. So she sneaked out of the house, drove down to Milwaukee, and 'identified' the body as that of her uncle. And she found that it was a simple matter to have it cremated right there, with no one the wiser. *Then* she drove back to Spoon Junction and murdered her uncle."

Ralph drove silently for a while. "There's one thing that worries me."

"What's that?"

"Sometimes you're right."

"Ralph," I said, "either *she* murdered her uncle when she returned, or her accomplice did."

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Ralph almost glared at me. "Now what makes you conjure up an accomplice?"

"Ralph, when you have a one-hundred-and-seventy-pound body to dispose of, do you suppose that a lone woman is going to have the strength to transport that body from a second-story bedroom to the grounds outside, much less dig the grave?"

For some reason Ralph seemed to be getting warm under the collar. "How do you know that her uncle slept in a second-floor bedroom?"

"Because he is rich, or at least well-to-do. Money is usually the motive for killing uncles. And being rich and living in a small town, he would undoubtedly live in a big house, rather than in one of the scarce apartment buildings, and big houses invariably have their bedrooms on the second floor, excepting those of the servants, of course."

We reached Spoon Junction at approximately one o'clock in the afternoon. A sign at its outskirts indicated its population as 3204. We found the Town Hall and identified ourselves to Spoon Junction's Chief of Police, a man named Gullickson.

Gullickson was middle-aged, florid, and weighed about 250 pounds. "Just what can I do for you?" he asked.

Ralph spoke. "We are investigating the possible mis-identification of a body in Milwaukee by one of your residents. It's strictly routine, but it's a little matter we want to clear up."

Gullickson nodded amiably. "Who did this mis-identifying?"

"A Miss Alicia Hennessey," Ralph said. "She came down to Milwaukee and identified the body of a hit-and-run victim as that of her uncle. Only we know now that it isn't her uncle."

Gullickson pondered. "Now why would she do a thing like that?"

Naturally I smiled. "That is what we are here to find out, Chief. Could you tell us where Alicia Hennessey resides?"

"I'll do better than that. I'll take you there myself."

Ralph and I joined him in his patrol car and he pulled away from the curb. "This Miss Hennessey," I said. "Is she engaged? Perhaps to someone rather strong?"

"Not that I know of. My wife keeps track of everything that goes on in this town and she would have told me. Why?"

"Is Miss Hennessey popular? Does she have a lot of muscular male friends?"

He shrugged. "According to my wife, she's pretty much of a stay-at-home."

Gullickson turned into a quiet residential street lined with monumental elms. After two blocks he parked at the curb before a large three-story structure set well back from the street on what appeared to be about four acres of well-kept open grounds.

I saw a rather burly young man on his knees working in a flower bed. "Who is that?"

"Clarence Tuttle," Gullickson said. "He's the gardener and grounds keeper. This place is big enough so that it's a full-time job."

I nodded sagaciously. "It all reminds me of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*."

Ralph seemed surprised. "Usually things remind you of *The Purloined Letter*."

"Not this time, Ralph." I sternly studied the man in the flower bed. "A strange pair, they were. The lady and her lover. So different by nature, by station in life. And yet they were magnetically, irresistibly drawn together."

Gullickson regarded Tuttle too. "I saw the movie. I hear they made a book out of it."

I now surveyed the extensive grounds. "It's a funny thing about bodies."

Gullickson scratched an eyebrow. "What bodies?"

I smiled enigmatically, of course. "I was just thinking that whenever one wants to dispose of a murdered body, one almost invariably buries it on one's own property. So to speak, in some cases. Probably because one knows where to bury it so that one will not be observed in the act or arrested for trespassing." I skillfully pulled myself out of the reverie. "Now shall we go up to the house and see Miss Hennessey?"

Gullickson hung back. "You two just go ahead. I'll join you later."

Ralph and I took the long walk to the front door and rang. When I looked back, I saw Gullickson talking to Clarence Tuttle.

A maid answered the door. Ralph and I identified ourselves, indicated whom we wished to see, and she escorted us to a drawing room overlooking the terrace.

Outside, I saw Gullickson and Tuttle apparently strolling the grounds. I frowned. Had I said too much? Was Gullickson trying to work my side of the street?

After ten minutes a young woman in her mid-twenties entered the room. She had rather green eyes and seemed not at all affected by the loss of her uncle. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting, but I was catching up on lost sleep."

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I got directly to the point. "Miss Hennessey, were you, or were you not, in Milwaukee early this morning and did you, or did you not, identify a human body in the Milwaukee City Morgue as being that of one Albert Hennessey, your uncle?"

She blinked. "Did you come all the way up here just because of that?"

"Please answer the question. Yes or no."

"Yes."

I smiled tightly. "Miss Hennessey, we are here to tell you that we know that the body which you so identified is not your uncle at all."

She seemed to study me. "I guess I made a mistake. The truth is that I didn't look at the body."

"The morgue attendant claims you did."

"Well, I was there and all that, but when he pulled out that drawer and started taking the sheet away from the corpse's face, I just couldn't look. I closed my eyes and just said, 'Yes, that's Uncle Albert.'"

"Why?"

"Because they'd already shown me Uncle Albert's wallet and the morgue attendant had described the body to me over the phone, and I thought that the police couldn't possibly be all that wrong, and besides, it's just a formality anyway, isn't it?"

"If you had kept your eyes closed, as you now maintain, the morgue attendant surely would have noticed and mentioned that fact to me."

"He didn't know that I had my eyes closed. I was wearing dark-green sunglasses."

I chuckled. "You were wearing dark-green sunglasses in the morgue in the basement of the City Municipal Building at two-thirty in the morning?"

"Because I'd been doing a lot of crying and my eyes were red and I didn't want anybody to see me like that. So I put on the sunglasses just before I stepped into the building."

Ralph was on her side. "Sounds reasonable to me."

Through the French windows I could see Chief Gullickson and Clarence Tuttle disappear into a blind spot between the garages and a shed.

I turned back to Miss Hennessey. "But why did you make such hasty arrangements to cremate the body in the city? Why didn't you want it shipped back home?"

"Because Uncle Albert told me that he didn't believe in funeral

services and besides, he wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered over Lake Michigan. And Lake Michigan is right there, next to Milwaukee, you know. So I thought that there wasn't any sensible point to having the body shipped all the way back home when everything could be taken care of right there."

Undaunted, I smiled. "Since the corpse was not that of your uncle, then your uncle must still be alive. Could I speak to him? Or has he suddenly gone on a long trip and no one knows when he will return?"

"Oh, no," she said. "He got back from Milwaukee this morning. As a matter of fact, that's him coming down the stairs right now."

I looked through the open drawing-room doors. I saw a man of about 50, weighing approximately 170 pounds, height five foot eight give or take an inch. He appeared to be frowning at an opened crossword-puzzle magazine in one hand.

I was not so easily defeated. "Just how many uncles do you have?"

"Just one." She greeted him as he entered the room. "Uncle, these two policemen came all the way from Milwaukee about that mixup at the morgue."

Uncle Albert, if it was he, nodded. "I was down there on business and had my pocket picked. Somehow this hit-and-run victim got hold of it and the police assumed that he was me and phoned Alicia."

Alicia smiled. "Frankly when Uncle Albert came back here at ten this morning I thought I'd seen a ghost."

Uncle Albert corroborated. "After I got Alicia calmed down and saw to it that she had a drink and went up to bed, I called Milwaukee to straighten out the mess. I talked to a Captain Masterson and he told me that the two of you were on your way up here about the matter. Evidently it was too late for him to recall you."

I had been looking out of those French windows again. Chief Gullickson and Tuttle came back into view. Gullickson snapped a pair of handcuffs on Tuttle's wrists.

I closed my eyes.

"Would any one of you by any chance know a four-letter word for foreign trade discount?" Uncle Albert asked.

"Agio," I said automatically.

He felt that he was on a winning streak. "A four-letter word for brain passage?"

"Iter. It is also a Roman road."

"My," Alicia said, "I just admire a man with a crossword-puzzle vocabulary."

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"Henry is one of the charter founders of the Wisconsin Crossword Puzzleteers," Ralph said. "As a matter of fact, he was elected Sergeant-at-arms."

I shrugged. "Probably because of my background."

Gullickson and Tuttle entered the room through a French window. Tuttle did not seem amused by the attention he was receiving, but the chief beamed. "I know where the body is."

I cleared my throat. "Chief, I'd like to speak to you privately for a moment."

"Whose body?" Alicia Hennessey asked.

"Mabel Tenninger's," Gullickson said.

I reviewed what my ears had heard. "Who the hell is Mabel Tenninger?"

"She was the chief teller over at the bank," Gullickson said. "Last week she disappeared. And so did thirty thousand dollars of the bank's money. We all thought she'd just skipped off for places unknown. She was always talking about traveling."

The chief still bestowed his smile. "When Sergeant Turnbuckle here talked about Lady Chatterley and strange lovers, I suddenly remembered that I'd seen Mabel and Clarence Tuttle walking together a couple of times. I didn't think nothing of it then because Mabel was in her forties and Clarence is about twenty-five. I thought they just happened to be going in the same direction and were just being polite to each other. But then when the sergeant mentioned about people burying murdered bodies, I began thinking.

"I asked Clarence some questions and didn't get too good answers. So we walked around the place until I found a spot between the garages and the shed that looked like a nice private place to dig a grave, if you wanted to. Also I noticed that three of the bushes there looked wilted, like their roots had been disturbed and they hadn't caught on again yet. When I told Clarence that I was going to get a shovel and dig, he decided there wasn't any point in holding back any more. It seems that he and Mabel had a relationship and Mabel thought they were going to leave town with thirty thousand dollars. Only Clarence had other ideas. He just wanted the money."

Clarence Tuttle wore the hang-dog look of a villain caught in the act.

Chief Gullickson put a hand on my shoulder. "I wouldn't have been able to solve this case without Sergeant Turnbuckle's help."

Alicia had evidently remembered more than my surname. "Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle? What does the S stand for?"

"Serendipity," Ralph said.

It did not.

"How does one get to join the Wisconsin Crossword Puzzleteers?" Alicia asked.

I had been staring out of another window. "There is an application blank in the back pages of your uncle's magazine."

"The Puzzleteers are having their annual convention in Sheboygan next week," Ralph said. "I think you take county trunk CC east from here."

Alicia's voice smiled. "I'll be there."

Ralph and I got back to Milwaukee and our desks at about four-thirty that afternoon.

Captain Masterson looked out of his office, saw us, and came out smiling. "Well, Henry, you did it again."

Why was the room so warm?

He turned to Ralph. "When Henry said that he smelled murder, it got me to thinking about Helmuth the Hand and his demise. I phoned the lab to see what they had and they said they'd come up with bright-green paint scrapings from the car that ran him down. Then I called the Motor Vehicle Bureau and had them do a rundown on Mrs. Watson and her husband. Sure enough, he owns a bright-green sedan. We went over there and found that the scrapings came from his car. It turns out that he was driving home after getting a couple of six-packs when he saw his brother-in-law crossing the street just ahead. So on impulse, he says, he just stepped on the accelerator and ran him down. Helmuth had a hefty life-insurance policy and his sister, Watson's wife, is the beneficiary."

For the second time that day I found a hand on my shoulder. "Without your words, Henry, I don't think we would ever have found out who ran Helmuth down."

The phone on my desk rang. I picked it up. "Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle," I said. "S as in serendipity."

It was a wrong number.

Some days are like that.

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